

VOTE - Voter Outreach Through Education Washington Secretary of State

WASHINGTON STATE CURRICULUM GRADES 8-12

TEACHER: LESSON 2

THEME: WHO'S WATCHING THE BALLOT BOX?

People need to know when they go to the bank to deposit hard-earned funds that their investment is safe. Similarly they need to feel confident when they go to the polling place or send their ballot through the mail that their hard-won right of suffrage is secure. From the registration process, through the counting of ballots, and the contents on the ballot, to the certification of the final results, their investment in democracy needs to be safe and reliable.

Washington's Office of the Secretary of State plays a vital and ongoing role in safeguarding and enhancing the quality and reliability of the entire election process. This elected office not only serves as the "watchdog" (guardian) of the procedures and results of elections but also strives continually to make voter registration and voting ever more accessible, reliable and efficient. However, each person also plays a vital role and has the responsibility to help protect the integrity of the electoral process by guarding against fraud during voter registration.

This lesson will:

1. Examine ways our state tries to keep campaign and candidates accountable to the public and to prevent election fraud.
2. Explore the nature of our state's Primary system and ask students to objectively evaluate it and its alternatives.
3. Present web sources for student research on these topics.

ACTIVITY: WEB BASED

Copy Student Lesson Two for each student. This activity can be done individually or collaboratively in teams of two or three students.

Students are directed to destinations on the Internet where they will research some of the safeguards that are in place of the election process. They will also discover that some controversy surrounds one unique feature of Washington's election process, the "Blanket Primary". These assignments can be assigned as homework or be done in a computer lab setting. The activities challenge them to teach themselves in a directed fashion, seeking answers to questions on three separate topics.

For activities one, two & three students are directed initially to write their answers. You can then decide whether to have those written answers turned in as a quality writing assignment (more formal) or used as the basis for sharing in class, or both.

Activity three is designed to be a collaborative effort using the "1-3-6" technique wherein each student does initial reflection alone, then combines his/her thoughts with those of two others for initial pooling of ideas and views. Next, each small group pairs with one other group to further refine arguments and maximize the chance for each student to again share questions and learn with others. Note that at the end you will need to facilitate a polling of group results on the issue. This could lead to a very fruitful discussion by the entire class since each individual has had several prior opportunities to engage the topic already.

If you wish students to become more familiar with the alternatives to Washington State's current Primary system, they can navigate to www.secstate.wa.gov, click on "Elections and Voting," then select "Blanket Primary." Once there, click on "History of the Blanket Primary" and look under "Potential Changes."

Students can find additional information and full text of the March, 2002 Federal Court decision on the California Blanket Primary by going to www.secstate.wa.gov, click on "Elections and Voting", then select "Blanket Primary." Once there, click on "The Courts/Litigation."

ONE: THE FINANCING OF CAMPAIGNS IN WASHINGTON STATE

1. Find and list at least three ways this state attempts to keep the candidates and campaigns accountable to the public and the election process safe from undesirable influence.
2. What is the role of the Public Disclosure Commission (PDC) in this effort to maintain voters' confidence in the election system?
3. What is the Internet address for the Public Disclosure Commission?

Possible Answers:

1. Limits on campaign contributions -- candidates must report periodically the source and amount of campaign contributions over \$25 and to list campaign expenditures. Reporting of donors who give large amounts -- the occupation and employer of individuals giving \$100 or more to a campaign must be identified. PDC was established. Campaign records open for public inspection right before the election.
2. Clearinghouse for information about candidates' campaign finances with some investigatory and enforcement powers.
3. The Internet address is pdc.wa.gov

TWO: PREVENTING ELECTION FRAUD

1. Considering the last three questions in the FAQ section, what are three provisions which attempt to ensure that only eligible citizens are registering and voting in Washington State elections?

Possible Answers:

1. Informing readers that fraud is taken seriously.
2. Establishing penalties.
3. Suggesting methods to address fraud.
4. Providing a concern form.

THREE: THE PRIMARY

1. In 1907, in this state, voters in the Primary would have to declare something in order to vote, namely what?
2. When voters declared, what kind of ballot do you think they would have received in return? Hint: See 1921, the second law passed to enforce this aspect of the Primary in our state's history.
3. In 1934, some citizens objected to the nature of our Primary system dating back to 1907. The State Legislators agreed that a change was needed, so in 1935 this state began the nation's first "Blanket Primary." After reading the description in quotation marks in the article, describe what "Blanket Primary" means and how it's different from the 1907 system. Put this answer in your own words.
4. The Democratic and Republican Parties objected to this 1935 change (Blanket Primary) all the way to the U.S. Supreme Court. What was the Court's ruling in 1936? Did the Court's ruling in 1978 support or reverse its 1936 decision on the same issue?

Possible Answers:

1. Their political party allegiance.
2. One that restricted voters to the ballot of that party.
3. "All properly registered voters to vote for their choice at any Primary for any candidate for each office, regardless of political affiliation and without a declaration of political faith or adherence on the part of the voter."
4. The Court upheld the Blanket Primary in both cases, as the Federal Court did again in 2002.